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ABSTRACT

Recent research suggests that occupational status is crucial in determining women's and men's occupational preferences. To examine individuals' reactions to occupations that varied in status and sex-typing, 184 college students (102 females, 82 males) rated items in the Career Expectations Booklet. Subjects indicated their affective reactions, performance expectations, and perceptions of the sex-typing for each occupation. Subjects also completed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire. An analysis of the results showed that affective reactions were influenced by status, whereas expected performance was determined by subject sex and status. Specifically, women's affective reactions to high status-masculine occupations were no different than men's, and were positive. Women's and men's affective reactions to low status occupations were less positive than their reactions to both masculine and feminine high status occupations. Men expected to do less well than women in low status-feminine occupations. These findings suggest that women are becoming more motivated for high status occupations, while accepting the reality that they are still likely to work in low status jobs. (Author/BL)

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Effects of occupational status and occupational sex typing on sex differences in reactions to occupations

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that occupational status is crucial in determining women's and men's occupational preferences. In this study, 104 female and 82 male college students rated occupations that varied in status and sex-typing. Affective reactions were influenced by status, whereas expected performance was determined by subject sex and status.

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Effects of occupational status and occupational sex typing on sex differences in reactions to occupations

Most theories of occupational choice suggest that women's and men's preferences for occupations are strongly influenced by sex-role identification, and the sex-role appropriatenesss of occupations (cf. Perun & Bielby, 1981). In addition, influential theories of achievement motivation and women's workplace particpation suggest that sex-roles are important determinants of women's (and men's) work-oriented achievement behavior (cf. Horner, 1972; O'Leary, 1974; Stein & Bailey, 1973).

Recent studies suggest that rigid sex-typing of jobs on sex-role lines may be breaking down, and is being replaced by concerns about the status of occupations (Garland & Smith, 1981; Stephan & Holahan, 1982). For example, Stephan and Holahan (1982) had subjects estimate stimulus persons' reactions to occupations that varied in both sex-typing and status. They found that in general, college students were more concerned with occupational status than with sex-role appropriateness. Garland and Smith (1981) found that sex-typing of occupations influenced subjects' motivation for the occupations more than did occupational status, but that women's occupational motivation was increased for high status masculine occupations. These studies have important implications for theories of occupational choice and for the understanding of women's workforce participation. If, as these studies suggest, women's workforce participation is characterized by the traditionally masculine concern with occupational status, greater competition for high status jobs and a decrease in sex-segregation of jobs may result.

In the current study, we extended Stephan and Holahan's (1982) findings to a situation in which subjects evaluated occupations in terms of their own reactions. Furthermore, Garland and Smith (1981) used only a small range of occupational status, which may have masked the effects of status. Thus, in the current study a full range of occupational status was used.

Finally, in order to account for the influence of the sex-role identification of subjects, we used a measure of masculinity/femininity as a covariate in analyses of variance.

Subjects and Procedure

The subjects were 82 male and 102 female college students who volunteered to participate in the study. They received extra-credit in their Introdutory Psychology classes in exchange for their participation.

Subjects were run in mixed-sex groups of 20 to 70 persons. Subjects first filled out informed consent forms, were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, then responded to items in the Career Expectations Booklet. The first page of the booklet contained demographic information items. On the second page of the booklet subjects were asked to consider one of ten occupations (see Table 1), and indicate their affective reactions (e.g., "How comfortable would you be working at this occupation?"), performance expectations ("How well do you think you would do in this occupation?"), and perceptions of the sex-typing of the occupation as a manipulation check ("How appropriate for men or women is this occupation?"). All items were scored on anchored 9-point Likert style scales. After all subjects had completed the first booklet, they responded to items in an Attitudes Booklet which contained the Personal Attributes

Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence et al., 1974). The PAQ is a measure of sex-role identification, and was used in this study as a covariate.

Results

A series of 2 (subject sex) X 5 (occupational sex typing/status) analyses of covariance were performed on subjects' responses to the Career Expectations booklet items. Subjects' masculinity and femininity scale scores from the PAQ were used as covariates. Femininity scale scores achieved significance in the analyses of subjects' responses to one item (Appropriate for males vs. females), $F(1,174)=3.78$, $p < .05$. Masculinity scale scores failed to achieve significance in any of the analyses. Main effects for occupation were found in analyses of subjects' affective reactions (Liking, Comfort, and Satisfaction), $F(4,174)=7.19$, 5.45, and 17.67 respectively, all $p < .001$ and the manipulation check, $F(4,174)=12.73$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). An interaction of sex and occupation was evident in subjects' performance expectancies, $F(4,174)=2.36$, $p < .06$ (see Table 2). Finally, females ($M=4.61$) more than males ($M=3.79$) reported that they would derive satisfaction from the occupation they had been asked to consider, $F(1,174)=4.21$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of the current study, taken with Stephan and Holahan's (1982) findings, suggest a picture of women's occupational achievement motivation that is very different from accepted theories. In contrast with the predictions of Stein and Bailey's (1973) and Horner's (1972) theories, women's affective reactions to high status-masculine occupations were no different than men's, and were positive. Women's and men's affective reactions to low status occupations, regardless of the sex-typing of the occupation, were less positive than their reactions to both masculine and feminine high status occupations.

In the current study, men expected to do less well than women in low status-feminine occupations. This result may reflect men's lower expected levels of effort in these occupations. Women's performance expectancies were less influenced by the status of occupations than were men's. This may mean that women are becoming more motivated for high status occupations, while accepting the reality that they are still likely to work in low status jobs (cf. Stephan & Holahan, 1982).

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Table 1
Stimulus Occupations

Occupation category	Stimulus occupations
High status - male	Physician, Lawyer
High status - female	Registered Nurse, Elementary School Teacher
Low status - male	Mail Carrier, Insurance Agent
Low status - female	Bank Teller, Secretary
Neutral	Real Estate Agent, Vocational Counselor

Note: Sex-typing of occupations was determined using U.S. Census Bureau figures (1980), and status of occupations was determined using data from Treiman (1977).

Table 2
Summary of Reactions to Occupations

	Means for Occupations				
Dependent variables	H-M	H-F	L-M	L-F	N
Liking for occupation	5.40b	3.73a	3.07a	2.68a	3.69a
Comfort in occupation	5.28b	4.25bc	3.09ac	3.15a	4.12ac
Satisfaction with occupation	5.88c	5.85c	2.68a	2.71a	4.27b
Expected performance					
females	5.26ab	5.68b	5.18ab	5.69b	5.85b
males	6.31b	5.05ab	6.00b	3.89a	4.77ab
Appropriate for females vs. males (low=females; high=males)	5.46d	4.33ac	5.19d	3.97a	4.59bc

Note: All main effects for occupation are significant, $p < .001$. Means are for items scored (9-point Likert style scales) so that high numbers reflect high comfort, liking, etc. Means within a dependent variable not sharing common subscripts differ according to Duncan's Tests, $p < .05$.
H-M=high status,male; H-F=high status,female; L-M=low status,male; L-F=low status,female; N=neutral